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The Psychometric Properties of the Italian Translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity: A Study among Catholic Adolescents

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RESEARCH REPORT

The Psychometric Properties of the Italian Translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity: A Study among Catholic Adolescents

The Italian translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity was developed and tested among a sample of 575 young people between the age of 16 and 17 years attending secular secondary schools in Rome, Italy. The data supported the unidimensionality, internal consistency reliability and construct validity of this instrument and commend it for further use in contributing to comparative empirical research within the psychology of religion.

Keywords: psychology of religion; attitude toward Christianity; religiosity; adolescents; students.

Introduction

The integration of psychological research across diverse populations worldwide requires cross-culturally validated research instruments. Within the psychology of religion the 24-item Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, originally published by Francis (1978a, 1978b), has already demonstrated good psychometric properties in a range of contexts. The original English-language version of this instrument has become widely available in a number of languages, including Arabic (Munayer 2000), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, and Lewis 2010), Chinese (Tiliopulous and Francis 2013), Dutch (Francis and Hermans 2000), French (Lewis and Francis 2003), German (Francis and Kwiran 1999), Greek (Youtika, Joseph, and Diduca 1999), Norwegian (Francis and Enger 2002), Portugese (Ferreira and Neto 2002), Romanian (Francis et al. 2009), Serbian (Flere, Francis, and Robbins 2011), Slovenian (Flere et al. 2008), Spanish (Campo-Arias et al. 2006), Swedish (Eek 2001), and Welsh (Evans and Francis 1996).

By the mid-1990s Kay and Francis (1996) identified around 100 independent studies that had employed the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity and began to draw together the cumulative contribution to knowledge that develops from disparate studies being united by a common instrument. In a more recent review, Francis (2009) discussed the advantages of organising and integrating empirical research in the psychology of religion around the attitudinal dimension on the grounds that the attitudinal dimension gets closest to the heart of an individual's religion.

In consideration of these findings, the aim of the present study is to extend this field of research by developing and testing the Italian translation of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity. Extending research employing the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity to the Italian context may be of particular interest, given the religious background of this country (Pallini, Bove, and Laghi, 2011).

Method

Sample

Participants consisted of 575 adolescents (286 female, 289 male) from two secular secondary schools located in Rome, Italy ($M_{\text{age}} = 15.63$; $SD = 1.16$; range: 14 – 17). Participation was obtained through an informed procedure that required their active consent. For all the test administrations, the study procedures were explained and participants filled in written versions of the questionnaires. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. This survey was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Commission of Sapienza University of Rome. A total of 97.9 % of the questionnaires were returned.

Measures

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity is a 24-item Likert instrument concerned with affective response toward God, Jesus, bible, prayer and church. The items were translated into Italian and then back-translated into English in order to test for inaccuracies and ambiguities. The items are assessed on a five-point scale: *agree strongly*, *agree*, *not certain*, *disagree* and *disagree strongly*. Eight questions are reversed for scoring purposes such that, when summed, higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. Participants were also asked to indicate how often they prayed and attended church on a five-point scale: *never*, *occasionally*, *at least once a month*, *at least once a week*, and *almost every day*.

Results

Table 1 presents the item rest-of-test correlation coefficients in respect to all 24 items, together with the alpha coefficient (first column) and the loadings on the first factor of the unrotated solution proposed by principal component analysis, together with the percentage of variance explained (second column). The alpha coefficient is established as 0.97, while the proportion of variance accounted for by the first factor is established as 62.6 %. Data support the conclusion that the scale is characterised by homogeneity, unidimensionality, and internal consistency reliability within the sample.

Insert table 1 about here

Construct validity of the instrument was assessed in terms of its correlation with other measures of personal religiosity. In the present study, attitude toward

Christianity scores correlated with personal prayer ($r = .67, p < .001$) and with church attendance ($r = .56, p < .001$).

The ANOVA analyses showed significant differences between females ($M = 87.91; SD = 22.11$) and males ($M = 82.55; SD = 24.62$), $F(1, 575) = 7.09, p < .01$, but no significant differences between the mean score of younger (14-15 years of age) and older adolescents (16-17 years of age), $F(1, 575) = 1.66, p = .19$. The two-way interaction between sex and age was not significant, $F(1, 575) = 0.54, p = .46$. These data are consistent with the general consensus in the psychology of religion that females report a more positive attitude toward religion than males (Flere et al. 2008; Flere, Francis, and Robbins 2011; Francis, Quesnell, and Lewis 2010).

Conclusion

The data support the psychometric properties of the Italian version of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity among a sample of adolescents between the age of 14 to 17 years attending secular secondary schools. The instruments can be recommended for further use within Italian context and should contribute to comparative empirical research within the psychology of religion across linguistic communities.

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Table 1. Item rest-of-test correlations and factor loading

Item	r	factor loading
I find it boring to listen to the bible*	.65	.67
I know that Jesus helps me	.86	.88
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	.83	.86
The church is very important to me	.80	.83
I think going to church is a waste of my time*	.75	.76
I want to love Jesus	.82	.84
I think church services are boring*	.61	.63
I think people who pray are stupid*	.53	.54
God helps me to lead a better life	.86	.88
I like to learn about God very much	.81	.84
God means a lot to me	.89	.91
I believe that God helps people	.83	.86
Prayer helps me a lot	.87	.89
I know that Jesus is very close to me	.87	.89
I think praying is a good thing	.82	.84
I think the bible is out of date*	.42	.43
I believe that God listens to prayers	.78	.81
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me*	.65	.67
God is very real to me	.80	.83
I think saying prayers does no good*	.49	.51
The idea of God means much to me	.82	.84
I believe that Jesus still helps people	.85	.87
I know that God helps me	.88	.90
I find it hard to believe in God*	.75	.77
alpha coefficient / % of variance	.97	62.6%

* these negative items were reverse scored